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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the citizens of Florida approved passage of Amendment VIII to the Florida Constitution, whereby the voters voluntarily gave up their right to elect a commissioner of education and a state board of education. In 1999, the standing commissioner of education appointed a blue-ribbon committee to review and recommend changes to the Florida system. In 2000, a state task force was appointed to lay the groundwork for system transition by 2003, work that is now completed. This report evaluates the current state of affairs in the Florida educational system. Questions addressed include: (1) Why change the organizational structures? (2) How successful has Florida been in delivering education services? and (3) Does the current system have a coordinated statewide system? Florida ranked 46th nationally in a study of performance of high school graduation rates for the 1999-2000 school year; opposition still exists within some institutions of higher education to creating a unified K-20 educational system; and there is still lack of coordination between different levels of education. The coordinated efforts of a unified board of education will serve students of Florida better. The task force has prepared an education service-delivery model that includes distance learning and better system coordination among all levels of education. (RT)

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Backgrounder

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Education Performance in Florida: A Need for Change

A James Madison Institute Perspective

by
Edwin H. Moore
President and Chief Executive Officer
The James Madison Institute

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In 1998, the citizens of Florida approved passage of Amendment VIII to the Florida Constitution whereby the voters voluntarily gave up their right to elect a commissioner of education and a state board of education. This change authorized the governor to appoint a new state board of education, thus affixing full responsibility for educational performance to the governor as chief executive officer of the state.

- In 1999, subsequent to the passage of this amendment, the standing commissioner of education appointed a blue-ribbon committee to review and recommend changes to the Florida system. A report was made to the legislature in the spring 2000 session.

- In August 2000, Gov. Jeb Bush appointed the Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force to lay the groundwork for the system transition by the 2003 constitutionally mandated timeframe. The task force has now completed its work and its report is being considered by the Spring 2001 Florida Legislature.

- This *Backgrounder* evaluates the current state of affairs in the Florida system. Questions addressed include the following:

  1. Why change the organizational structures?
  2. How successful has Florida been in delivering education services?
  3. Does the current system have a coordinated statewide vision?

I. Introduction

In 1998, the citizens of Florida approved passage of Amendment VIII to the Florida Constitution whereby the voters voluntarily gave up their right to elect a commissioner of education and a state board of education (SBE). This change authorized the governor to appoint a new state board of education, thus affixing full responsibility for educational performance to the governor as chief executive officer of the state. The people had decided to place both responsibility and accountability in a single office. For decades Florida elected governors who ran on "improving education" platforms. In reality, these "education governors" had little direct authority over education issues and even less accountability for the performance of the Florida education system.

The concurrent change in the cabinet structure as a result of this amendment is seen as a choice by the voters to promote a system of governance headed by a "strong governor" who would now appoint a seven-member state board of education that is responsible to him.

In 1999, subsequent to the passage of this amendment, the standing commissioner of education appointed a blue-ribbon committee to review and recommend changes to the Florida system. A report was made to the legislature in the spring 2000 session. The legislature responded by sunsetting almost all of the state agencies with responsibilities in education. They intended to create a new governance model that is "seamless, student-centered, which values excellence, provides greater access and promotes academic success."[1]

This model combines all education functions in Florida, from kindergarten through graduate school, under a Florida Board of Education appointed by the governor, and an appointed commissioner of education who would, in turn, appoint chancellors for each delivery system. The model places as much responsibility as possible at the delivery level for policy and operational decisions, while using this combined, coordination board for system-wide vision and policy development, program evaluation, and accountability.

In August 2000, Gov. Jeb Bush appointed the Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force to lay the groundwork for the system transition by the 2003 constitutionally mandated timeframe. The task force has now completed its work and its report is being considered by the Spring 2001 Florida Legislature. The proposed unified system professes to be student focused with an organizational structure headed by an appointed seven-member board and a new commissioner of education. Four system accountability units are to be under this board, namely: an executive director for a Division of Non-Public Education; a chancellor of K-12 education; a chancellor of community colleges and career preparation; and a chancellor of state universities.

This *Backgrounder* evaluates the current state of affairs in the Florida system. The focus is twofold: Has the current separation of governance of K-12, community colleges, and higher education been beneficial to Floridians, and will the proposed system create "a more responsive system that supports a new philosophy towards world-class performance, results, and accountability."[2] Questions addressed include the following:

1. Why change the organizational structures?
2. How successful has Florida been in delivering education services?
3. Does the current system have a coordinated statewide vision?

II. The Task Force Report

In February 2001, the Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force completed its investigation and issued a report calling for significant changes in the delivery of educational services in Florida. These recommendations include the following major initiatives, with a shorter timeline than originally determined.

- The legislature should articulate a clear vision for the relationship between the state and local entities.
- The transition to a K-20 system should be established in law and made effective July 1, 2001.
- An interim state board of education should be appointed and given authority to implement the new governance structure.
- The interim board of education and the commissioner of education should be authorized by statute to reorganize the Florida Department of Education effective July 1, 2001.
- A board of trustees should be appointed at all postsecondary institutions with statutory authority and duties.
- A comprehensive accountability method for a K-20 system should be enacted.
- The new board and the existing method should partner during the phase-in period between July 1, 2001, and January 2003 to insure the creation of a seamless delivery system of education.

III. The Controversy

These recommendations are not without controversy. Opposition has come primarily from those who resist the blending of higher education—particularly those institutions that had been managed under the board of regents (BOR)—into a unified system of K-20 education. The current university presidents have endorsed the proposals. Some opponents tried to politicize the issues involved. There have been similar efforts by the legislature while under the leadership of a Democrat Party majority to remove the board of regents and establish governing boards at each institution, such as in the 1979 legislative session.

Those who would preserve the status quo in higher education governance have used three major, and sometimes conflicting, arguments in favor of maintaining a separate BOR governance structure for upper-division, postsecondary education.

First, they maintain that the 10 institutions comprising the state university system (SUS) would suffer in the competition before the governor and the legislature amongst the other segments of education. They fear that K-12 would dominate the debate and reap higher rewards in the competition for limited state resources.

Second, they argue that the state already has an effective higher education system that should not be tampered with or altered. The status quo is good enough for them and should be preserved. Proponents of change believe there are conflicting points being used by the same groups who advocate keeping the regents system. Some argue that, without the BOR, each institution would be free to lobby on its own behalf in the resource competition (as if each institution does not already dedicate ample staff time to pursuing programs and funds from the legislature). This scenario yields two resulting and fully contradictory points of view:

- The bigger schools, with more graduates and thus more legislative clout, will squeeze out smaller institutions.

- Schools in areas with larger populations and larger legislative delegations will have more influence and dominate those from smaller population areas.

These arguments were used recently by U. S. Senator Bob Graham (D-FL), an advocate of maintaining a separate BOR and thus keeping higher education separated from a seamless system. In his February 26 address at Florida A&M University (FAMU), he stated that the university does not have the "raw power" to compete with larger universities.[3] Proponents of changes in the system have countered that FAMU has not historically fared well under BOR management. These opposing arguments are in direct conflict with each other, yet defenders of the status quo use both when the situation warrants. Each argument is based on supposition and presupposition, and neither is supported by factual evidence. The supposition is that the current situation has been beneficial to all institutions equally in program approval and funding. The presupposition is that the situation cannot be improved and in fact will be worse than the current relationships.

Third. Another argument is made that the performance of the Florida higher education system would be hampered by blending years 13-20 with the rest of the K-12 system. The concern here is that the competing constituencies would be more powerful at the K-12 level and that a disproportionate share of the state's resources would flow to K-12 at the expense of the postsecondary institutions. Under the proposed structure, the state board of education would have budgetary and priority setting responsibilities. It would develop an annual budget to submit to the governor and ultimately to the legislature. The political structure that exists today and the role of the elected bodies would not change. The legislature would maintain its authority to establish spending priorities and could at any time favor one segment of education over another.

The creation of a seamless budget with program and spending initiatives presented in a coordinated fashion would be useful for all delivery systems. It would insure that an established list of spending priorities becomes a focal tool for legislative deliberations. "Divide and conquer" budget competitions would be a thing of the past under a unified approach. It is imperative that the new structure place responsibility for final budget development with the newly created state board of education for presentation to the governor. To do this effectively, this board should also have a mechanism for program approval at all levels in the higher education system. The governing boards at each of the institutions should prepare budget submissions based on "big picture" parameters presented early in the process by the state board of education. New programs presented by the governing boards should be reviewed by the state board, subject to majority approval before submission to the governor and subsequently to the legisla-

ture. This would prevent needless duplication of replicated majors that would produce graduates far in excess of what the market can absorb. This type of coordinative function is essential for the state board to function properly.

IV. Why Change?

Beyond the mandate to respond to the will of Florida voters, is there a need to significantly alter the educational service delivery system? Could these changes not be better effected by further study and minor alterations as has been done for decades? A history of incremental changes coupled with a "silo" approach to educational service delivery has not served Florida well. Restructuring is necessary.

In Florida's current system, approximately 40 percent of all ninth- to 12-grade students fail to finish high school within four years. The Florida high school graduation rate for school year 1999-2000 was 62.3 percent.[4] Florida's K-12 system was recently ranked 46th in a national study of performance of high school graduation rates. According to the *Postsecondary Educational Opportunity* study, "In the fall of 1998, 38.8 percent of all 1997-98 19-year-olds were enrolled in college somewhere in the United States immediately after high school graduation".[5] Florida ranked 47th nationally with a participation rate of 28.2 percent, with only Alaska, Nevada, and Arizona scoring lower.

According to the Florida State Board of Community Colleges (FSBCC), about 15 to 20 percent of graduating high school seniors are fully prepared for the challenges of higher education annually. Unprepared students must take remedial classes at the community college (CC) or university level at great expense both to the taxpayer and to the students and parents. According to a recent study by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, community colleges nationally spend $65 million per year on remediation, with four-year institutions spending $24 million annually.[6] David Armstrong, FSBCC executive director, calls this "[A] waste of time, talent, and money for students, parents and taxpayers."[7]

In an analysis by the Florida Community College System, for each 100 ninth graders in public schools in 1995-96, 60 had graduated by 1998-99. Thirty-one out of the 60 graduates enrolled as degree-seeking students in the SUS or CC systems; only 20 in this group were found to be college ready.[8] It is apparent the current K-12 system is not performing to the degree that any unbiased observer would find satisfactory.

This lack of educational success is not a problem in Florida alone. Poor performance is endemic to our entire educational structure. Florida has an opportunity for national leadership in innovative practices. Poor results are especially evident in the poorer communities, both in Florida and the nation. As stated in *No Excuses: A Study of 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools*:

> The failure of most public schools to teach poor children is a national tragedy and a national disgrace. Fifty-eight percent of low-income fourth-graders cannot do basic math. The magnitude of this educational malpractice is staggering. Of the roughly 20 million low-income children in K-12 schools, 12 million aren't even learning the most elementary skills. These children have little hope of mastering the responsibilities of citizenship.[9]

Clearly, Florida has problems that will require a new generation of citizens to address and resolve. Our current educational structure falls short of the promise of success and attainment required in a successful modern society. A new structure will allow for innovation and exploration.

Students Ready for College:

of

100 Ninth Graders

60 Graduate from High School

31 Continue to Public Post Secondary Schools

20 are College Ready

The up-to-85 percent of underprepared graduating high school seniors cited by FSBCC are a drain on limited state resources. The College Preparatory Program offered through the state community colleges cost almost $90 million dollars for fiscal year 1999-2000. Add to this dollar cost the collateral cost to society for students who lack the skills to succeed, struggle to stay in school, and who pay tuition for remedial classes even before becoming degree-seeking students. Florida exists in a competitive world. What are the related costs of projecting these results to business and industry nationwide? Would they choose to locate elsewhere if Florida continues to offer an educational system that ranks among the bottom in the nation? A statewide coordinating board would be able to analyze these costs and determine where limited resources could best be spent to improve retention and graduation rates. Such a board could also focus on successes and failures within the system to be used either as models for replication or as examples of what to avoid.

Further evidence of the need for better system coordination is found in the retention rates of students in the higher education system. The Florida Community College System had a 62.84 percent retention rate for all full- and part-time students during the period Fall 1995 through Spring 1999.[10] The SUS numbers reveal a retention rate in the 70 percent range year-to-year.[11]

According to the Southern Regional Education Board, only 55.9 percent of Florida students entering all public colleges and universities graduated within 150 percent of the normal time expected.[12]

These data erode the arguments in favor of maintaining the status quo. A great many ill-prepared students enter our higher education system every year. The vast majority enroll in our community college system, which is then responsible for bringing underprepared students (who should have been better served at the K-12 level) up to acceptable standards of performance. The burden of funding these remedial efforts falls on the taxpayer through the community college and SUS budgets. Since tuition only covers about one-fourth of the cost in higher education in Florida, the balance is paid largely by the taxpayer.

V. The Talented 20 Percent

Much has been said of the One Florida initiative and the use of the standard of admission to higher education in Florida of the "Talented 20." Under this program, high school students graduating in the top 20 percent of their classes are guaranteed admission in the state university system. According to an analysis by the Florida Department of Education (FDOE), even this cohort presents a disappointing picture of performance and readiness for college. Based on 1997-98 statistics, there were 100,228 public high school graduates, which would have yielded a Talented 20 potential of 20,046 students. Of this total, only 16,206 would have had the requisite 19 core course academic credits required to qualify for the Talented 20 program if it had been in effect at the time of their graduation. Eleven thousand one hundred twenty-six of these young people applied to the SUS (56 percent of the potential eligible Talented 20) and 9,379 were admitted (47 percent of potential Talented 20). Of the potential Talented 20 for the school year 1997-98, 53 percent did not enter the state university system after their high school graduation. Neither did almost 91 percent of the total graduating class.[13]

VI. System Potential

A coordinating K-20 board of education will enable the state to determine where these students go and most importantly why they make the choices they do.

A coordinated effort is necessary to identify the successful programs at the K-12, community college, and SUS levels, as well as those programs that fail to meet acceptable standards of performance. The current system does not have a systematic means of tracking student performance based on source institution for the entire K-20 delivery system. A state board of education with proper vision and full-system responsibility could identify, both at the county and the institutional level, which systems or institutions graduate the highest numbers of students who require remedial assistance and which ones the least. Schools of education within the SUS could be engaged to develop innovative programs of outreach, first to surrounding communities on a pilot basis and then to other regions. Broad linkages could be developed between the current A-Plus Education Plan and the postsecondary system to not only track successes and failures but also to take steps to improve successful programs and to replicate them in lower performing schools and districts. Further, the state board of education could develop a system to analyze retention rates at all colleges and universities, track students as they move within the system, and monitor the time-to-degree progress at each institution. Tuition pays for only one-quarter of the associated costs of education; it is therefore important for the state to know the time-to-degree performance at each institution for full-time students. The taxpayer foots the bill for delayed graduations.

VII. How Successful Has Florida Been?

How successful are existing programs and institutions? Can they be better coordinated? The focal discussion for any reorganization or restructuring effort should center on whether the current system:

- Maximizes performance objectives while insuring the proper husbandry of limited resources, and
- Can be improved by greater efforts at coordination.

A review of performance outputs of selected Florida school districts provides a worthwhile perspective. Are current programs and services allocated and delivered in a manner that will insure a reasonable expectation of performance regardless of location? Do K-12 students from these areas compete on an equal footing with students from other counties or states?

For simplicity and purposes of analysis, we reviewed the percentage of students entering college who tested competent on reading, writing and math skills in 1997-98. Of Florida's 67 counties, the five best performing counties are contrasted with the five lowest performing counties (see Table 1).[14]

Table 1. 1997 Values Chart

County	% Ready	Personal Income Per Capita	Population	Schools	SUP % Eligible	Graduation Rate	Drop Out
Best Performing							
Calhoun	79.6	14,072	12,900	7	47.24	75.46	2.76
Collier	78.7	36,210	200,000	43	43.58	69.25	6.47
Liberty	78.6	13,868	7,700	5	49.69	85.59	3.37
St. Johns	80.3	31,458	106,000	29	28.19	75.35	1.47
Sarasota	82.5	35,654	311,000	42	36.3	79.87	4.24
Worst Performing							
Gadsden	33.9	15,819	491,700	24	82.56	55.74	7.89
Miami/Dade	38.7	21,688	2,070,600	367	59.08	72.05	8.09
Osceola	44.2	17,476	148,800	35	33.77	81.95	5.28
Sumter	42.6	15,847	44,400	12	63.18	74.5	5.67
Union	44.9	11,077	13,100	6	42.22	83.89	3.31

While The James Madison Institute does not draw firm conclusions from these data, it is useful to note what they do not show. Performance levels do not seem to be directly affected by district populations—whether urban or rural—or even by per capita income. School districts of varied demographics scored both high and low in the performance analysis. A seamless approach to the delivery of education services might better allow for a determination as to why some districts perform better than others.

Table 2. Florida Performance

Percentage ready in:

Reading	Writing	Math
71.4	76.7	66.7

In 1997, 45,881 students took the proficiency test. Of this total, 25,389 (58.8 percent) were sufficiently proficient in all areas and 41.2 percent were found to be deficient in at least one of these tested areas.

These are the students who graduate from Florida high schools and either apply for admission to postsecondary institutions or enter the workforce. Approximately 28 percent of eligible high school seniors in 1997-98 either failed to graduate or dropped out of school. These students eventually seek further education or employment and are ill prepared for either.

It is useful to compare the performances of public and private institutions in Florida. A statewide coordinating board will be able to maximize program linkages, breaking free from the current silo approach to education service delivery. Successful programs at every level or type of institution should be studied and considered as models for the benefit of any institution receiving tax dollars, either directly or indirectly.[15]

Two items are of particular note in this comparison. One is the larger percentage of private school graduates seeking continuing education. The second and most telling need for a more highly coordinated system is this. Almost 42 percent of continuing students from both public and private high school institutions initially pursue postsecondary education at the community college level.

Table 3. Students Continuing Education

	1998 Graduates	Total % Continuing Somewhere
Sarasota	1,545	66
St. Johns	797	51
Calhoun	109	63
Collier	1,178	73
Liberty	76	70
Gadsden	324	79
Miami/Dade	13,888	68
Sumter	236	62
Union	115	70
Osceola	1,349	51

Table 4. High School Graduates Continuing Education 1999

Total	Continuing	%	Florida CC Public	Florida CC Private	Florida C&U Public	Florida C&U Private	Out-of-State Public and Private	Tech. and Trade In	Tech. and Trade Out
Public School Graduates									
98,435	56,614	58	25,271	338	18,190	3,240	5,891	3,070	614
Private School Graduates									
11,973	11,070	92	2,678	129	3,820	1,228	3,025	125	65

VIII. Community College Focus

Approximately 70,000 students a year transfer from Florida community colleges to the 10 SUS insitutions. A strong SBE can view this flow of students from the high school level through graduate school more analytically. Florida has approximately 100,000 public high school graduates per year. Of these, 58 percent pursue some form of continuing education; seven out of 10 attend community colleges. Of these, a significant population continue at a state university. The state needs a better tracking mechanism for these students to manage its limited resources and to maximize the students' success. The SBE could work with the K-20 system components by developing models for the most appropriate placement for success for each student; by using remediation where required with the intent to gradually diminish the need for remediation; and by replicating the most successful programs, thereby setting system wide standards.

The proposed K-20 system structure relies on the current governance of community colleges. Its local boards have management authority and control with system innovation and coordination done by the FSBCC.

But a revised K-20 service delivery system can do more than borrow a governance structure from the community colleges. A community-based educational focus and attendant practices have enabled the community college system to innovate and experiment to improve service delivery. This system, with an open admissions policy for all with a high school diploma, serves students with limited basic skills (up to 85 percent require remediation). It provides outreach programs to county school districts, which strategize to attack the source of these students' poor academic performance. They can link SUS schools of education to the county school systems, both in innovative programming and service delivery and in teacher training and recertification.

Key system improvements and relationships that should be maintained or implemented at the community college level include:

- Strengthen the 2+2 arrangements.
- Expand teacher pre-service and in-service training.
- Expand bachelors and masters degree opportunities through current SUS institutions offered through community college facilities.
- Build state multi-university facilities sited on college community property.
- Fully implement articulation agreements with all public and private institutions with continuation of Articulation Coordinating Committee.
- Coordinate assistance to county districts of best practices as determined by the SBE, supported by other system institutions.
- Expand linkages to Workforce Florida programs.
- Expand partnership with county systems, private and state universities, private colleges, and business.
- Improve linkages and coordination with private sector job training programs to encourage innovative practices and to avoid duplication of service while providing support for private sector activities.
- Maintain common course numbering system and common prerequisites program.
- Standardize AA & BA required class hours.
- Continue Articulation Coordinating Committee efforts.
- Improve focusing on remedial education practices and attendant institutional costs.

Since over 70 percent of students in the SUS upper division begin their postsecondary education in the community college system, it is imperative that the state board of education link each level; students entering community colleges and students who continue in upper division programs at SUS. Florida ranks fifth in the country in the production of AA degrees and ninth in enrollment in two-year institutions. Almost 60 percent of AA graduates enter state upper division institutions every year. A community college delivery system should embrace the point of view that educational services at that level are often part of a journey, not a final destination.

Remediation issues should be discussed system-wide. College community systems institutions can deliver remediation services at costs far lower than SUS institutions. Inappropriate placement of students has an impact far beyond the fiscal costs of bringing students to acceptable levels of performance.

For many students, placement in the community college provides community supports that encourage them to remain in school and that alleviates the additional stress of financial obligations. Retention can have a heightened focus at this level. Success can take precedence until stated performance levels are reached. Programs can be structured to assure access for students into state university programs once acceptable standards are attained. Financial aid incentives can also be packaged for program participants.

Access to higher education is a critical issue for all Floridians. However, there needs to be a balanced focus on retention, success, and graduation if the state is to receive the benefits from an educated citizenry.

IX. Conclusion

The Florida experience is one that cries out for radical structural changes in the delivery of educational services. The future economic needs of a rapidly growing state in a highly competitive region of the country demand the creation of a board empowered to craft a statewide vision for education. Florida cannot afford to continue the separation of governance powers if the result continues to be dismal performance by students and even more dismal rankings in national comparisons. The collateral damage to the state is unacceptable.

Those who favor maintaining the board of regents ignore the harsh reality of an underperforming system that requires continued infusions of taxpayer money with positive results on the margins and mediocrity at best in the main. Our flagship institutions should have the freedom to flourish under a vision and mission created and maintained by local governing boards. All institutions should have the opportunity to determine their roles in the delivery of educational services and be able to respond creatively to the needs of the state at large or to regional requirements and opportunities.

Those who argue to maintain the status quo are defenders of system mediocrity at best. The current system should not have to respond to a battle cry of "Rise to Mediocrity" when what is needed is a war on failure and a refusal to acquiesce to mediocrity.

The coordinated efforts of a unified board of education will better serve the students of Florida. The new board should be comprised of citizen members who bring a combination of education, management and public service skills to the board. Compensation beyond per diem should not be provided for SBE members. If given at all, it should be restricted to no more than daily compensation for meetings, hearings, and special assignments plus standard per diem arrangements. A full-time salaried board would lose the broad input and independent thought gained from lay members. Once the new system is approved, both the office of the governor and the legislature must develop a deep faith in the process and in the programs, proposals, and budgets put forth by the new board in order to maximize the benefits that can be obtained from a statewide vision. Meddling by the creation of new programs and schools through the legislature, without full consultation and analysis by the SBE, would be detrimental to the overall success of the education structure. Those who fear the influence of politics in the new structure are not paying attention to the current one. Success requires full confidence

in the process. It also requires knowledge by the public and by those who deliver the services that a truly integrated planning process has been created and that decisions are based on careful study and analysis.

Elected officials must develop a comfort level with the new processes and know there is a professional approach to decisionmaking and policy, and that the fiscal decisionmaking is sound public policy. There is no need for super majorities throughout the process if the requisite confidence in the professional approach to decisionmaking can be established and maintained. Respect for both the process and the structure will need to flow in both directions. Those who support the BOR maintain it serves to protect universities from the legislature. A more powerful and respected SBE provides a more logical buttress in these processes, once policy decisions reflect the welfare and interests of all students and taxpayers and are not perceived as political posturing. The point of view should be that the legislature will positively accept policy decisions made by the state board of education instead of the perception it is interfering in the process.

It will take awhile for this faith to fully evolve. The first critical step is the appointment to the new state board of education of individuals who share in a statewide vision, who are not perceived to be purely political in nature, and who bring a wide range of experience and perspective to the process. This will go far towards establishing the confidence required by all participants in this process.

The ultimate goal should be the creation of a new SBE and the selection of an energetic commissioner who together will plan, review, and recommend the changes needed to bring Florida a 21st century quality system. Florida's goal should be greater than "Leave No Child Behind" as this too modestly states what must be done.

The Education Governance Reorganization Transition Task Force has prepared significant recommendations for consideration by the Florida Legislature. These recommendations are based on six guiding principles, which if adhered to, will enable Florida to move forward in the development of a seamless system. It will not be a simple or an easy process, but if allowed to be free from the vagaries of the political process and supported by the positive aspects of this same process, it will succeed. If supported by those who have been elected to serve the people of Florida, it can succeed in creating a far more successful and accountable system that never finds the status quo to be acceptable.

A new state board of education will allow Florida to move forward in the development of a seamless approach to education that includes all institutions at every level. It will focus on student needs, and recognize that there are many paths to success in life and that not all students are destined for traditional higher education. The goal of the state should be the creation of high school graduates who share the vision of lifelong learning and the knowledge that learning can be achieved through many alternative venues.

The new SBE can be the conduit for creative approaches to service delivery such as the creation of a fully integrated system-wide high speed networked linkage with extensive online course capability. Higher education should be focused downwards through the system and encouraged to develop programs like the Web-MC program being developed at Florida State

University. Seamless education is more than a catch phrase; it is a model of performance that should be encouraged, monitored, and expanded in each opportunity available to maximize the state's resources.

An innovative SBE can be the catalyst for the extension of higher education services to place-bound residents through the creation of innovative practices and services. Alternative service delivery models can be explored to reach those who either live great distances from facilities or who are unable to travel. Examples of innovative practices that could be advocated by the new state board of education include:

- Distance learning.
- University center models that allow multiple institutions to share a facility in cooperative degree programs.
- Better system coordination with our SUS institutions and the extended community college system.
- Heightened linkages between the community colleges and local K-12 districts for early remediation of underperforming students and community-based teacher certification programs.

A model for an innovative approach to education service delivery has been prepared by the task force with this assignment. No other state has taken this bold leap into coordinated system design. The results of the current structure demand the remediation of an underperforming system. There is much work that remains and there are issues to be decided by the legislature, among which the creation of a policy for the setting of tuition stands out. The enabling legislation should allow the flexibility required for innovative policy development by the new SBE. Creative and entrepreneurial approaches that heighten creativity and maximize the use of existing institutions should be within the purview of the authority and responsibility of the new board.

President George W. Bush, in his address to a joint session of Congress on February 27, 2001, said, "Our new governing vision says that government should be active, but limited; engaged, but not overbearing."

This statement also serves as a useful prescription for a new state board of education. The system can only get better.

Endnotes

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